Book Review: Agathe Reingruber, Zoï Tsirtsoni, Petranka Nedelcheva (eds), Going West? The Dissemination of Neolithic Innovations between the Bosporus and the Carpathians. London: Routledge/European Association of Archaeologists, 2017, 184 pages, ISBN-13: 978-1-138-71483-0

Book Review: Agathe Reingruber, Zoï Tsirtsoni, Petranka Nedelcheva (eds), Going West? The Dissemination of Neolithic Innovations between the Bosporus and the Carpathians. London: Routledge/European Association of Archaeologists, 2017, 184 pages, ISBN-13: 978-1-138-71483-0

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This volume, the third in the **EAA monograph series 'Themes in Contemporary Archaeology',** had its origins in a symposium organized by the editors as part of the *20th Annual Meeting of the European Association of Archaeologists*, held in Istanbul in September 2014. The aim of the symposium was to bring together archaeologists, geomorphologists and radiocarbon scientists to discuss the mechanisms by which farming, and the Neolithic way of life, spread through the Balkans as far as the Danube region. Of the 15 papers presented at the Istanbul symposium, only eight appear as chapters within this book – together with a new contribution by Clemens Lichter. To these nine chapters have been added an *Introduction* by the editors, and an *Appendix* compiled by Laurens Thissen and Agathe Reingruber providing details of radiocarbon dates from 127 sites, corresponding to the geographical and chronological coverage of the volume.

Understandably, perhaps, the scope of the volume differs from that of the Istanbul symposium, in two important respects. The geographical coverage has been extended to include the west and northwest areas of the Pontic (steppe) region in Moldova and Ukraine, while 'the spread of farming' in the title of the symposium has become in the book title, 'the dissemination of Neolithic innovations …'. In fact, there is very little about farming in this book, and much more about material culture, technology and social patterns. The geographical coverage extends from the Aegean and Marmara Sea regions, through the Balkans east of the Dinaric Alps, to the Carpathians and the northwest Pontic region, and the overall timeframe spans from the mid-7th millennium through the 6th millennium cal BC. The individual chapters, however, vary in geographical and temporal scope, in approach, and in the research questions that are posed.

Three chapters focus on individual sites, which are among the earliest known Neolithic settlements in their respective areas. **Necmi Karul** looks at the Early Neolithic on both sides of the Marmara Sea through the lens of his excavations at Aktopraklik C in northwest Anatolia. **Burçin Erdoğu** provides a personal view of the origins and early development of the Neolithic in the Aegean, based on the evidence from the site of Uğurlu on the Turkish Aegean island of Gökçeada. Both authors situate their evidence and ideas in a wider regional perspective, and consider the Mesolithic background to Neolithic settlement. The third site-specific contribution, by **Laurent Lespez et al.**, reviews the benefits and results

of mechanical coring at the site of Dikili Tash in northern Greece. This paper stands as an excellent demonstration of how coring can be used as a rapid and relatively inexpensive and non-destructive means of collecting samples from subsurface contexts for AMS ^{14}C dating and palaeoenvironmental analysis, to provide new information on landscape context, settlement pattern and chronology. More importantly, the paper is a stark reminder that current perceptions of the character and timing of some of the most important cultural transitions in Southeast European prehistory, including the beginning of the Neolithic, have been built on the evidence from tell sites, yet the lowermost (and *earliest*) levels of many of these settlements were never reached in archaeological excavations!

The other six chapters in the volume offer regional perspectives, though four of these are narrowly focused on individual lines of evidence – pottery in the case of the contributions from **Nikolov** and **Thissen**, lithic technology in the chapter by **Gatsov et al.**, and burial practices in the article by **Lichter**.

Vassil Nikolov provides a short, but nonetheless useful, review of his ideas, developed over several decades, on the Neolithization of Thrace – the southeast part of the Balkan peninsula, which is bounded in the north and west by the Balkan and Rhodope mountains, and in the south and east by the Aegean and Black seas. Nowadays, this region is divided between Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey, though much of what Nikolov has to say concerns Bulgarian (North) Thrace. In Nikolov's model of Neolithization, the earliest Neolithic of Thrace is characterized by painted pottery. This tradition is envisaged to have spread from southern Anatolia, through the Aegean, then from west to east across Thrace via the Struma and Mesta river catchments. The subsequent development of the Neolithic is divided by Nikolov into five phases spanning from 6100-5200 cal BC, based mainly on changes in the ceramic repertoire whereby the painted pottery of the Early Neolithic is ultimately replaced by plain dark ware.

The focus of the contribution by **Laurens Thissen** is on what he terms the 'First Balkan Neolithic' (FBN), characterized by distinctive forms of pottery typically in association with ceramic figurines, specific types of bone artefacts, and caprine husbandry. What Thissen calls the FBN, some previous authors have variously referred to as 'Monochrome Neolithic', 'pre-Karanovo', 'pre-Criş', or 'Proto-Starčevo'. In Thissen's view the FBN appears abruptly across much of Southeast Europe north of the Rhodope Mountains around 6000 BC, and represents the forerunner of the Starčevo-Criş-Körös culture complex. Based on his analysis of the ceramic assemblage from Măgura-Boldul lui Moş Ivănuş in southern Romania, Thissen provides a succinct review of the main stylistic and techno-functional characteristics of FBN ceramics. Although he avoids discussing the origins of the FBN, he finds no evidence of a local hunter-gatherer contribution to the ceramic repertoire; rather he builds a scenario wherein the Neolithic is disseminated through the Balkans by small, pioneer farming groups in which women are the potters and the knowledge is transferred from generation to generation and, through social and economic exchange, to local hunter-gatherer communities.

Ivan Gatsov *et al.* consider the topic of Balkan 'Neolithization' from the perspective of lithic technology. They highlight the existence of two contrasting lithic traditions in the region, between 6500-5500 cal BC – 'bullet core' and 'macroblade'. Their accounts of these phenomena are somewhat sketchy; bullet cores are presented as a characteristic of the Fikirtepe culture and confined to Anatolia, while 'macroblades' are seen as a diagnostic feature of the Early Neolithic of Greece and the Balkans. Since 'bullet cores' (it is claimed) have not been found on the Southeast European mainland and the authors are unable to

identify a place or time of origin for the macroblade tradition, readers may be left wondering how their lithic technology approach contributes to, or goes beyond, current 'models' of Neolithization. Their arguments are not helped by the fact that the paper is an uneasy amalgam of two texts, exhibiting contrasting styles and approaches, and a degree of repetition and even contradiction – one written by Ivan Gatsov and Petranka Nedelcheva, and the other by Malgorzata Kaczanowska and Janusz Kozłowski. That aside, the article raises many points of contention, which demand a more detailed critique beyond the confines of this short book review.

Clemens Lichter adopts a novel approach to the question of Southeast European Neolithization, asking whether burial customs can help to identify routes or directions in the spread of the Neolithic? His contribution provides a review of Mesolithic and Early Neolithic mortuary practices in Anatolia, the Aegean and the Balkan peninsula, including a distribution map of sites with burials dating to the period from the 9th to the first half of the 6th millennium BC. Several interesting patterns emerge from his analysis: i) crouched inhumation was the norm among Mesolithic burials from Anatolia, the Aegean and Greece, while extended burial was predominant in the later Mesolithic of the Danube Basin and the northwest Pontic region; ii) by contrast, in the Early Neolithic of the central and northern Balkans crouched inhumations replace extended burials, while the latter continue into the Neolithic and Chalcolithic of the eastern part of the Lower Danube valley and along the Black Sea coast, suggesting either a continuation of local Mesolithic traditions or acculturation from the northwest Pontic region. These regional variations in burial practice tend to support the view (see below) that not all features of the Balkan Neolithic emanated from the south.

The two remaining 'regional survey' chapters in this volume take a broader approach. **Eylem Özdoğan** examines the role of the western Black Sea coast in the spread of the Neolithic through Southeast Europe but finds no evidence for the transmission of Neolithic traits along the coast from the south or of interaction between coastal Mesolithic communities and inland farmers, concluding that "… *the Black Sea was on the periphery of the Neolithic core in the Balkans during the 6th millennium BC*", and did not become a major communication artery before the Chalcolithic. Given that the Mesolithic-Neolithic coastline between the Bosporus and the Crimean Peninsula, and large swathes of the contemporaneous hinterland, are now submerged due to sea level rise, this conclusion is hardly surprising. In a particularly thought-provoking contribution, **Agathe Reingruber** reviews the archaeological evidence of Early Neolithic settlement in the region extending from the eastern part of the Lower Danube valley northeast into the forest-steppe region between the Prut and Bug rivers (west Pontic region). She argues that the Anatolian-Aegean contribution to Neolithization is far less evident in this region compared to areas further west and south in the Balkans – the result of contact and cultural interaction between early farmers of east Mediterranean origin and pottery-using foragers originating in the forest-steppe zone. Among other things, this interaction is reflected in the variable timing of the introduction of farming across the region, and in Neolithic pottery styles and burial practices that are clearly rooted in the regional Mesolithic.

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As noted above, *Going West? The Dissemination of Neolithic Innovations between the Bosporus and the Carpathians* is the third volume in the EAA's peer-reviewed monograph series, 'Themes in Contemporary Archaeology', the avowed aim of which is to provide "cutting

edge perspectives on key areas of debate in current archaeological enquiry" (European Association of Archaeologists 2017). Some of the chapters in the book are based on information and ideas that have simply been recycled from earlier publications by the same authors, and so can hardly be described as 'cutting edge perspectives'. Other chapters do contain new evidence and/or original or revised thinking – even if one important line of research, palaeogenomics, with the power to transform our understanding of the nature, timing and trajectories of Neolithization in Europe (e.g. González-Fortes et al. 2017), hardly merits a mention throughout the volume. The omission of abstracts for individual chapters is regrettable and only partially compensated for by the editors' *Introduction*, although the inclusion of an *Index* and an *Appendix* containing a database of radiocarbon dates is to be commended.

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